30

Intercultural business education

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1. Introduction

The contemporary business arena is increasingly recognised – usually through the buzzword 'global workplace' – as a site of disparate identifications and communication practices that cut across cultural and national boundaries. Students of business/management, and others in the workplace, have come to embrace the value of intercultural communication skills and knowledge for handling this complex, ambiguous, and pluricultural context (Mintzberg 2004). They must also be able to account for individual distinctiveness in the local environment and foster the human engagement that enables development. How, then, is intercultural communication—as a theoretical concept, a practical tool, and an educational discipline within business/management education—to be conceptualised and delivered?

In this chapter, we attempt to address this question. We begin by exploring conceptualisations of intercultural communication that have influenced its teaching and research in the management/business context. Next, we describe some critical responses to this situation and more recent approaches that seek to develop experiential learning and critical/reflective intercultural action. Then, we outline our own approaches and research activities to promote students' intercultural learning. We finish with implications and possible future directions.

2. Historical perspectives

The concept of intercultural communication, and the idea that people need to have some kind of 'intercultural competence', is becoming increasingly important in business/management education. It began in the 1950s when foreign nationals, who had been given language training as preparation for their overseas missions, discovered that language was but one aspect of the toolkit they required for their overseas work (Martin and Nakayama 2007). They also needed an understanding of the culture of the people with whom they were going to reside and work. More recent explorations in the business/management discipline extend this other-oriented knowledge/awareness to person attributes/skills that are considered achievable through self-development. Such competencies are discussed variously as 'global mindset', 'intercultural leadership/negotiation/teamwork skills', and 'cultural intelligence' (Earley and Ang 2003).

In this section, we describe the foundational orientations of 'intercultural competence' — value orientation frameworks for understanding cultural difference—that have underpinned much intercultural communication research to date in both business and management, and more generally. This is followed by a brief review of other influential social science approaches.

Foundational orientations: understanding cultural differences

As intercultural contact increased, through job mobility and migration, researchers became more interested in understanding how people understood difference. Thus, frameworks for understanding culture evolved, often culture specific, rule based, and goal achievement oriented, on ways of communicating and behaving with people from 'elsewhere'. Culture

was understood as learned patterns of behaviour and 'the most deeply felt beliefs shared by a cultural group … [and] a shared perception of what ought to be, and not what is', developed through interaction with others (Martin and Nakayama 2007). This line of thinking seeks to understand cultural difference in terms of shared value orientations, alternatively known as cultural dimensions. Influential frameworks in this vein include Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) five value orientations, Hall's (1976) high/low context communication, Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions framework, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner' (1997) seven value dimensions, and House *et al*.'s (2004) eighteen dimensions in the GLOBE model of culture. Below, we illustrate these value orientations through Hofstede's framework, a most widely cited heritage of cultural dimensions that has shown 'persistent importance […] in recent cross-cultural management, cross-cultural human resource management and practices, and the dominant consideration of corporate culture' (Barmeyer *et al*. 2019: 236).

The first value orientation, power distance, refers to the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept the unequal distribution of power. New Zealand, Denmark, and Israel are considered to value low power distance, minimising adherence to hierarchies of power. In contrast, in countries such as India, China, and Mexico, hierarchies and decision-making processes and relationships among managers and their subordinates are portrayed as more formalised.

The second value orientation, femininity/masculinity, refers to the extent to which gender roles are valued, and attitudes toward ascribed masculine values (e.g., achievement, ambition). Japan, Austria, and Mexico scored high here, valuing gender-specific roles, whereas northern European countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway) demonstrated a tendency to value the feminine orientation (preferring gender equality and quality of life for all).

The third value orientation, uncertainty avoidance, refers to a preference for unambiguous and uncertain situations and maintaining the status quo. Countries (or territories) with weak uncertainty avoidance (the United Kingdom, Sweden, Hong Kong, and the United States) are considered more risk taking, accepting of dissent, and less rule structured. Countries with strong uncertainty avoidance (Japan, Portugal, Greece) tend to favor rules and regulations and seek consensus about goals.

The fourth value orientation, individualism/collectivism (a binary posited earlier by Hall 1976, and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961), refers to individual vs. group orientation. Individualist countries (e.g., New Zealand, Australia, the United States) emphasise personal over group goals, weak group and organisational loyalty. Collectivist countries (e.g., Arab countries, Brazil, India) emphasise community, collaboration, shared interest, harmony, tradition, and maintaining face (Martin and Nakayama 2007).

Later, as a result of extensive criticism of the Western bias of this framework, Hofstede (2001) added a fifth dimension—long- and short-term orientation or "Confucian dynamism"—which emphasises Confucian values such as persistence, thrift, personal stability, and respect for tradition. So, in the work context, employees who reflected long-term orientation (as in China, Japan, Korea) have a strong work ethic and show respect for status differences, whereas those with a short-term orientation (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada) focus on short-term results, seek quick gratification of their needs, and show less concern for status.

These cultural dimensions offer an explanation for the variation in interaction patterns of people from different national cultures, thus providing guiding potential for, for example,

expatriates with managerial tasks in international contexts. International business managers and marketing professionals have drawn upon these to predict the communication preferences of employees/customers from particular cultures, analyse conflict scenarios involving cultural difference, and devise strategies to foster intercultural synergy (e.g. intercultural management training) (e.g. Storti 2009; Gomez and Taylor 2018). For example, Gil *et al.* (2019) examine the functional diversity among top management teams in multinational enterprises. They suggest that such diversity is likely to improve firms' performance in collectivistic national cultures but not in individualistic national cultures.

The cultural dimensions also subject concepts such as equality and fairness to various cultural interpretations. For example, in many Western nations, the notion of equality suggests that, fundamentally, individuals are created equal, yet disparities in talent, intelligence, or access to material goods exist, and notions of fairness require that people be treated accordingly. Yet in collectivist cultures where history and tradition provide guidance for behaviour, social expectations of deference to seniority (e.g. derived from knowledge and power) would be intertwined with dominant discourses and practices of equality and fairness.

Yet, despite their wide application, models of cultural dimensions have been strongly criticised for their Western bias and methodological limitations. These criticisms are discussed later in the chapter.

Other approaches to learning about culture

Martin and Nakayama (2007) categorise approaches to learning about culture and cultural difference into the social science, positivist, and functionalist approaches. By studying cultures objectively, from an outsider's position, researchers seek to make generalisations

about communication and behaviour. In a social science approach, researchers analyse difference according to a set of variables, such as value orientations (as described above), which are typically applied in sociological research and in cross-cultural psychology. Further examples include Gudykunst's (2005) anxiety uncertainty management theory, which explains how anxiety and uncertainty can influence the communication of strangers in their interactions with those in the host community. And Ting-Toomey's (2005) face negotiation theory uses variables of collectivism and individualism to measure the extent to which people in such cultures (e.g., China and the United States respectively) use face negotiation strategies to manage or avoid conflict. A recent example is Vu and Gill's (2019) proposal for 'fusion leadership', aimed at integrating 'ingredients' of different values and mindsets (such as task-relationship, Eastern-Western) towards more effective managerial responses to cross-cultural challenges.

Similarly, cross-cultural psychologists have focused on cultural difference by measuring these and other variables fundamental to the study of intercultural communication, including those of nationality, ethnicity, personality, and gender (Brislin 1999). The role of perception is important in developing learned patterns of thought and meaning that make up our culture. Allport's (1979) famous work on prejudice describes how the cognitive activities of categorisation and generalisation that occur normally in the human brain are an important way of making sense of the world around us. Although such categorisations are useful as sense-making strategies for human behaviour, if unchecked, they can lead to more extreme understandings of cultural difference, such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice—the roots of racism. As a result, the social science approach to researching and understanding cultural difference has been heavily criticised, and it is to these critiques that we now turn.

3. Critical issues and topics

Critiques of the "cultural difference" frameworks

Cultural difference frameworks (as described above) within the social science, positivist approach have prevailed in intercultural communication management/business training, education, and research (Barmeyer *et al*. 2019). They provide new entrants with 'tools' to make sense of culturally new phenomena, and with 'rules' about how to communicate with potential clients and colleagues from other places and backgrounds. These 'tools' and 'rules' are easy to access and convenient to apply. Many believe that these would naturally translate into one's ability to enter into a new culture and communicate with its people effectively (Chuang 2003; Martin and Nakayama 2007).

However, there have been criticisms of such frameworks. For example, McSweeny (2002) presented three main 'flaws' in Hofstede's (1984) research design: (1) the population surveyed were employees of Hermes and IBM, a United States multinational whose employees represented their organisational goals; (2) the validity of the items used in constructing some of the indices was questionable, thus raising concerns about assessing any one group's attitudes and lived experiences; (3) the data were collected using a paper and pencil survey, a method that is laden with positivist constructs and approaches to representing understanding. Others problematise the Eurocentric bias of the research, with the researchers as 'experts' and the exotic natives as others and not as co-owners and co-producers of knowledge (Chuang 2003; Tuhiwai-Smith 2012). Ferri extends the critique to a fundamental limitation of Western metaphysics (an epistemological tradition underpinning the value orientation approaches), which assumes 'an original signified that encloses truth within a system of binary oppositions' and identifies 'truth' from the 'negative' through an entity's full presence (or absence for the latter) (2016: 99). This argument is substantiated by

observations that boundaries of dichotomies of difference often fail to account for globalisation, economic progression and agency in specific work contexts (e.g. Guirdham 2005; Nathan 2015; Pudelko *et al*. 2015).

Conceptually, a paradox emerges when a value orientation approach is adopted in intercultural business education. Students are trained to use value orientations as an 'add-on', combining them with models of business in order to improve existing practices (e.g. employee recruitment and staffing strategies) vis-à-vis 'new' features of the workplace resulting from globalisation. In an applied fashion, students learn to 'import' culture as an external explanatory source to help them understand and deal with (new forms of) business. Underlying this approach is a perpetuated disjuncture between culture and business: intercultural business (communication) is not recognised as a phenomenon, a complex whole, or a subject for intellectual scrutiny in its own right (Varner 2000).

Ethically, studying culture as static and monolithic entities, alongside analyses of exotic examples of cultural behaviours, can result in 'essentialising' people. That is, they presume 'universal essence, homogeneity and unity in a particular culture … [and] reduce cultural behaviour down to a simple causal factor' (Holliday *et al*. 2004: 2). As students draw on these constructs to analyse the (exoticised) other – often through an imperial and colonial gaze – they ignore the intersubjective and negotiated processes that embody intercultural communication encounters. A further outcome of these approaches is othering—'imaging someone as alien and different to "us" in such a way that "they" are excluded from "our" "normal", "superior" and "civilised" group'. (Holliday *et al*. 2004: 3).

Instead, Holliday *et al*. (2004) argue that students need skilled communication strategies and principles in a globalising world. Still other scholars have called for context-specific analyses of intercultural communication and new tools for local contexts (Ting-Toomey 2010). These theoretical and methodological approaches shift the focus away from 'differences between national cultures and the development of universalised competences within international groups, towards multiple identities and particular competences within local groups' (Lund and O'Regan 2010: 56). Thus, the next section focuses on knowledge/skills building and training, approaches used by educators and trainers/coaches in the workplace.

Intercultural education and training

Managers have come to recognise the need for employees to receive management diversity training in their organisations (Landis *et al*. 2004). No longer are knowledge and skills in intercultural communication for others—that is, those on overseas assignments, or migrants entering the workplace—but for all gender, ethnic, and racial groups who come together for purposes of work. In these plurilingual/pluricultural contexts, new ways of connecting, working, and learning are required (Edwards and Usher 2008). Rigid frameworks that essentialise people according to their culture and ethnicity have given way to more flexible approaches that require people to be responsive to changing contexts. This transcultural context requires research theories and methods that enable people to encounter interculturality in real world situations. In this new context, educators and trainers draw on a range of tools to simulate real world situations that highlight problematic intercultural communication and/or conflict, for example, vignettes, case studies, critical incidents, and other problem-solving activities. Other methods include reading about another culture, spending time with people from another culture (Mughan 2009), learning about other cultures

through various online or web-based training tools (Storti 2009) and online intercultural exchanges (O'Dowd 2007). (See also Chapter 22, this volume).

A further approach is to start with 'self' by asking learners to examine tacit values and norms that frame their own behaviours in their encounters with cultural others. This strategy would enable the exploration of stereotypes, ethnocentrism, prejudice, and the resultant essentialising and othering that evolve from these categories of difference (Jack 2009; 2015). Further, learners are encouraged to practice self-monitoring in intercultural interactions. Self-report studies and protocols that enable learners to self-assess their competence abound (see examples in Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). However, self reports are limited in that they tend to develop learners' intercultural competence in generic terms, rather than culture-, context-, or individually-specific terms. This limitation may result in part from self-report methodology, which relies on multichoice answers or Likert scales as their bases for self-assessment (c.f. Spitzberg and Changnon 2009), and not critical reflective self-evaluation (of both self and other) based on some intercultural encounter (which is the approach adopted by the 'Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters' (Council of Europe 2019 and Holmes and O'Neill 2010; 2012).

However, intercultural business education and training should not lose sight of its primary educative function. This is not to exonerate organisations from guilt or legal redress, purely because they have fulfilled managerial functions in training staff – mainly at behavioural levels – to manage diversity or risk assessment. Phipps describes this as the 'deficit' model of training which seeks to address 'danger' in the workplace, thus forcing employees into 'dominant and uncontestable models of good citizenship' (2010: 62). Szkudlarek also warns that, rather than promoting authentic communication and ethically relevant looks at oneself,

if unquestioned, intercultural business education and training could become ‘a place for dress rehearsals before the real show’, producing over-trained ‘sophisticated Westerners’ (vs. the ‘primitive’ Rest) who ‘play their intercultural roles’ with artificially taught and calculated communicative behaviour while alienating ‘themselves from the performed characters once the curtain comes down on a business deal’ (2009: 981). Instead, as Phipps argues, (intercultural) education and training should prepare people – through processes of finding common ground and discernment – for ‘the mess and struggle of dialogue, human trust, subtlety of context-based understanding, a disposition that is enabled, through careful sensory perception, to be attuned to a new habitat, a new place, a different context’ (Phipps 2010: 65).

4. Current contributions

Having discussed a range of social science approaches and considered their contributions and limitations, we now turn to interpretive and experiential approaches, and then intercultural action and reflexivity as critical responses to exploring intercultural interaction through education.

Interpretive/experiential approaches

More recent research has seen a focus on experiential learning. To this end, Bennett (1998) argues for the need to improve intercultural communication and sensitivity through education and training by exploring core concepts played out in intercultural exchanges. Therefore, trainees need to develop skillful facilitation where they have the opportunity to ‘acquire increased self-awareness and other-awareness’ and to ‘confront emotional and communication challenges and practice context-pertinent communication skills’ (Ting-Toomey 2010: 21).

Experiential learning has also been linked to real life, firsthand experience. For example, Mughan (2009), in his research on small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), noted that investment in intercultural skills analysis and development has mostly focused on the foreign language needs of first-time exporters, largely ignoring the intercultural dimension. However, he found that much of the learning required to manage business across multiple markets and cultures lay in some foreign language skills, although not necessarily using them, but also in the higher education level of the owner–manager. Other ways include valuing prior professional experience in other cultural environments and frequent interactions in situ with members of other cultures both at home and abroad.

In the context of MBA education, Tomalin (2009) noted that experiential learning is embodied in the learning cycle—activity, debrief, conclusion, implementation. This model draws on Kolb and Fry's (1975) seminal work—the four-step learning cycle in experiential learning—which involves: (1) concrete experience; (2) observation and experience; (3) forming abstract concepts; and (4) testing in new situations. Although Kolb and Fry's model has been criticised for its Western assumptions of selfhood and not sufficiently accounting for other cognitive and communicative styles (Tennant 1997), the model is commonly applied in intercultural education and training.

To conclude, these forms of experiential learning resonate with conceptually-based intercultural learning, suggesting the importance of links between theory and practice in intercultural training and education (Mughan 2009). However, Jack (2009; 2015) notes the importance of teaching approaches that encourage critical transformation in learners. A scholarly response to this situation has seen, on the one hand, the emergence of critical theories of management education and business, and on the other, a greater emphasis on

intercultural competence—the skills, behaviours, and knowledge required to understand and manage interaction with people who have other ways of thinking, doing, communicating, and being. In this context, developing sensitivity, mutual respect, and critical understanding in intercultural encounters is important in facilitating successful intercultural relationships and communication. 'Critical' intercultural learning would include developing critical thought, critical self-reflection, and critical action (Alred *et al*. 2003; Guilherme *et al*. 2010; Jack 2009). Thus, students must be encouraged to 'critically analyse the value assumptions of different knowledge systems, forms, and categories' (Banks 1991:126), necessary steps in developing potential managers who demonstrate moral and political responsibility. This aspect of criticality is explored in the next section.

Developing critical intercultural action and reflexivity

To prepare learners to become accountable to and for others through their ideas, communication, and actions, management educators must 'provide the conditions for students to learn in diverse ways how to take responsibility for moving society in the direction of a more realizable democracy' (Giroux 2004: 20). This means requiring learners to draw on their (lived) experiences and values while attending to interpersonal relations, communication, conflicts, feelings, and politics (Grey 2004). Within this section, we discuss three meta-approaches to developing critical intercultural action and reflexivity: examining the macro-ideological context of intercultural business communication, teaching about intercultural teamwork, and understanding identity and communication through intersectionality.

The macro-ideological context of intercultural business communication

Jack (2009) argues that, although many of the courses in intercultural communication teach learners critical thought and critical self-reflection, they do not necessarily promote critical action. The management academy, including both its teaching and its practice, is embedded in and constrained by Eurocentric thought and geographical location, and as such, legitimises those in and with power to decide whose and what ideas count. Instead, drawing on Said's (1978) 'orientalism', Jack invites learners to examine and question the hegemony and cultural imperialism of the dominating colonial structures responsible for this Eurocentric managerialism.

Further, Jack (2009) states: 'an obsession with the marketplace obscures and often distorts a broader discussion of values and relations to the Other' (p. 101). He interprets this limited vision as perpetuating the status quo, whereby 'institutions shape and edit the managerial self to fit the institutional interest of the organisation' (2009: 101). Echoes of this can be found in critical works that flag up neoliberalism as an invisible ideology that shapes and limits contemporary intercultural communication (Zotzman 2011; Gray *et al.* 2018). Within neoliberal ideology, now widespread through (inter-)governmental activity, economic actors are persuaded to see the global market as approximating a natural environment where national economies, companies, and people are subjected to an evolutionary mechanism for both their own good and the common good (Zotzman 2011). People, and their cultures, are exposed to competitions (assessed by material success) on a global scale to fulfill this cycle of evolution, where 'the fittest culture will survive' and others driven 'to extinction' (Dupré 2001: 112). Zotzman (2011) warns that adopting a neoliberal approach to intercultural communication would encourage the view of otherness as an asset/impediment in the global market and deepen marginalisation and inequality – ultimately to the detriment, rather than benefit, of the conditions under which people meet and communicate. Therefore, intercultural

business education, as any form of education, need to commit to humanistic values of wellbeing and justice and to approaches that foster students' 'practices of liberation' (Jack 2009, citing Foucault 1984) as well as sensitivity to the ideological shapers of their action.

Methods of motivating and enabling such critical reflexivity are not straightforward, especially if intercultural business education is mainly delivered within the classroom, where students' processes of knowing are inevitably distantiated from action. The outcome is also dependent upon students' previous exposure to intercultural business communication associated with age and experience. Notwithstanding these challenges, conventional classroom-based pedagogies can afford powerful interpretive possibilities with the aid of suitable material.

A recent attempt is the use of the documentary film *American Factory* (a Netflix release in 2019) in the second author's (Vivien's) teaching context. The Netflix synopsis of this real-life-based film presents a typical 'intercultural business problem': 'hopes soar when a Chinese company reopens a shuttered factory in Ohio. But a culture clash threatens to shatter an American dream'. Students watched the movie together, conducted their analysis of the 'problem' individually, and compared their perspectives in groups. Much of their initial discussion – somewhat unsurprisingly – revolved around their observation of an ostensible divide between a relatively feminine 'American' working culture that values fair treatment and quality of work and life and a highly masculine 'Chinese' working culture that emphasises efficiency, material gains, and power distance, a divide culminating in a 'conflict' about unionisation. Students were encouraged to suggest ways of 'bridging the cultural gap' to 'resolve' this 'conflict' and then consider the limitations of this essentialist, value-oriented

approach in theory and practice (c.f. China and the United States scored similarly in terms of masculinity according to Hofstede 2001).

This was then followed by a re-interpretation of the film, where students were guided to scrutinise the narrativity of the story and the discourse adopted by the people in the film as they responded to intercultural tensions. Students noticed how those (social) actors began their new international collaboration with 'intercultural knowledge' gained from 'Sino-US cultural training workshops' and goodwill for intercultural 'bonding' through their unified identity as a 'global' company, but nevertheless proceeded to create a discursive divide between 'us' and 'them' under the pressure of task efficiency and imbalanced power relations rooted in capitalism. Students began to see how this increasingly solidified divide gradually blocked the actors' willingness to communicate with cultural others and allowed 'two (bounded) cultures' (i.e. 'Chinese' and 'Americans') to emerge and compete until one of them ('Chinese culture') stood out as *the* culture 'best suited' to the market imperatives. Alongside this process was a common problem that the business leaders, managers, and workers from both countries had to face and battle with: frustration with the cultural other, wellbeing problems, and financial loss/unemployment. Students also noted mixed opinions in regard to 'democracy' and 'hard-working ethos' expressed by actors from each country, which blurred the cultural boundary between China and the United States as frequently portrayed in the international business literature.

In this class exercise, students engaged with interpretivist traditions of inquiry to develop *thick* understandings of intercultural business communication as a complex whole. This vicarious ethnography (a concept we detail soon) enabled students to gain anti-essentialist learning points through critically examining the film characters' 'unsuccessful' approach to

intercultural business communication, an approach that aimed to 'fix' a fundamentally humanistic, and a potentially constructive, process of dialogue through capital-driven inter-/pre-vention and one that used 'culture' as a scapegoat for, or a resource to justify, a deep-seated (transnational) *class* problem.

Intercultural teamwork

This type of critical reflexivity can also be achieved through teaching about intercultural teamwork, for example, by encouraging learners to appreciate the complexity of teamwork processes, the inherent ethnocentric values of team members, the range of emotional responses engendered by teamwork, and issues of resistance (Cockburn-Wootten *et al*. 2008). For example, in the first author's (Prue's) teaching context, students are invited to question existing power structures, knowledge, and conditions in the wider society (Giroux 1997), and to engage in student/teacher dialogue and co-constructed learning. Communication in this learning context is thus characterised by negotiation, conflict, persuasion, and critique. In the second author's (Vivien's) teaching context, students are encouraged to explore the possibility of, and confront their limits in, seeking intercultural dialogue in interdependent work-based team relationships, where people's organic goodwill for harmony is often interwoven with irreconcilable interests/priorities and incommensurable values/struggles (Zhou and Pilcher 2019).

Guilherme *et al*.'s (2010: 2) study of intercultural teamwork emphasises a relational perspective though the lens of intercultural mobility—where divisions between guest and host are diminishing and where we begin to 'look for the Other in ourselves'. In their investigation of the intercultural dynamics of heterogeneous groups in the cosmopolitan context of the European workplace, Guilherme *et al*. (2010) found that people demonstrated

intercultural mobility through processes of self and social discovery, and 'languaging'. That is, they engage in a critical cycle—'a reflective, exploratory, dialogical and active stance towards cultural knowledge and life' (Guilherme 2010: 4). The outcome, she argues, is intercultural personhood, where an individual becomes more interconnected and networked, and is able to perceive, and, we would add (ideally), manage risk. She concludes that an individual's ability to recognise and manage intercultural dynamics is where his/her intercultural competence lies, but that such competence is a process of continuous transformation. Therefore, as we have noted in our own work, focusing on intercultural teamwork has the value of educating learners to become managers who demonstrate moral, social, political, and cultural responsibility as well as flexibility (Holmes *et al*. 2005).

Identity and communication as intersectionality

As people move from place to place, they take with them, or leave behind, aspects of their identities are evolving through their intercultural communication experiences. Instead of identity being framed more simply as in-/out-group differences (Tajfel 1978), it is now more useful to speak of multiple identities that account for religion, history, political, and economic conditions, locality, region, and nationality, and in organisational diversity management, of gender, age, and (dis)ability (Martin and Nakayama 2007), and mobility. Identities associated with such axes of social divisions 'operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but build on each other and work together' (Collins and Bilge 2016: 4). Further, changes in how we communicate face-to-face and via social media have resulted in what Martin and Nakayama (2007) describe as contested and fragmented identities. These identities are played out in ever-changing communication contexts – physical or virtual, across time and space – as people exercise their agency to construct and negotiate who they are. Intersectionality provides an analytic tool to describe such complexity, not only in the

light of plural identity categories that reference recognised social divisions, but also through the meaning these categories gain from mutually influencing power relations (Collins and Bilge 2016) of racism, ageism, sexism, heterosexism, etc..

To conclude, a critical approach to intercultural communication seeks complex understandings of intercultural communication that embrace questions of power, representation, and knowledge of the other, and just as importantly, questions about self in relation to other and whose interests are being served. These questions are particularly important in the current global economic context as Western financial institutions seek to exploit the resources of poorer, developing nations; and in both the global North and South as societies grapple with human dislocation and forced migration resulting from protracted crises and war.

5. MAIN RESEARCH METHODS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In this section, we focus on the question: 'How can teachers of intercultural communication encourage business/management students to engage with intercultural communication as critical reflection and action?'. We describe the methods explored in our respective teaching contexts in business/management departments. These methods are underpinned by the educational concepts/traditions of experiential learning, ethnographic inquiry, and praxis. (See Holmes 2015 for an expanded exploration of the critical theories and pedagogies she has adopted in intercultural business education.)

Underpinning concepts

Experiential learning

To develop students' intercultural knowledge and skills, they require tasks that enable them to prepare for intercultural engagement and communicative interaction with others, and then to reflect on those experiences. These processes echo those described in Kolb and Fry's (1975) four-step experiential learning cycle (described earlier). Ramsden (1992: 40) notes that students need intellectual challenge and the opportunity to develop a sense of independence, but also active engagement with one another, which leads to the possibility of learning from one another. Students also need to engage in deep learning, which encourages them to relate prior, extant knowledge to new knowledge and everyday intercultural experience both within and outside the classroom (Biggs 1999). Finally, an experiential learning approach requires students to think for themselves as active agents in the learning process.

Ethnographic inquiry

Noels, Yashima, and Zhang (Chapter 3, this volume) highlight the benefits of longitudinal, multilevel research designs that can account for changes over time, and describe intercultural communication processes in situ. Drawing on a tradition of students as researchers (Jackson 2006; Jordan 2001; Roberts *et al.* 2001), we provide assignments where students become researchers/observers of intercultural communicative phenomena in business-related communicative contexts. They engage in intercultural communication research with people from diverse backgrounds, and then write reflective essays about the experience. By applying theory they have studied in the course to their own intercultural communication experiences, they reflect not only on the competences of the other, but more importantly, on their own intercultural competence.

Praxis

Embedded in Kolb and Fry's (1975) experiential learning cycle is the notion of praxis. In the context of intercultural communication, praxis refers to the need for self-conscious and ethical actions where individuals question their past behaviour as well as future possibilities. Praxis encourages students to reframe past behaviour, which they have performed and examined in their intercultural encounters within the context of their research tasks. Then, by linking these experiences to theory they have been exposed to in their course work, they are able to open up new possibilities for engaging with cultural others. Thus, our goal here is to teach students, through intercultural engagement, a process of reflection and analysis for future action.

Drawing on these educational concepts and traditions, we ask students to carry out research where they explore some aspect of interculturality. These research tasks involve intercultural experience, where students can begin by identifying who they are (to acknowledge their own socially constructed beliefs, values, and behaviours), and where they can critically analyse and reflect on that experience in order to take action (Alred *et al*. 2003). We now outline two student-led research assignments we have explored to deliver intercultural business education.

Our approaches: developing intercultural competence in business/management education

In the first research project, the first author of this chapter focused on developing students' self-understanding of their intercultural competence through intercultural encounters with a cultural other. Knowing about intercultural competence is important because it offers 'the potential for taking action, for mediating and reflecting the values, beliefs and behaviours of one language group to another – and the opportunity for reflexivity, i.e., to critically analyse one's own values, beliefs and behaviours' (Byram 2008: 228). Therefore, finding ways for

students to develop and evaluate their own intercultural competence is important in enabling them to become successful intercultural communicators in the workplace, and in society generally. Students were assigned a research task requiring them to engage in extended intercultural interaction with someone from another culture over several encounters. Drawing on their intercultural communication and experience in the context of those encounters, they then wrote an autoethnography of their experience in which they reflected on and evaluated their intercultural competence. The findings from their autoethnographies suggested that defining, acquiring, and evaluating intercultural competence is complex, messy, and iterative. The findings indicated that communication is influenced and/or constrained by religious, cultural, ethnic, and value differences, and may involve (re)construction and (re)negotiation of an individual's intercultural communication and identity. The outcomes of the project indicated the importance of reflection on intercultural experience in understanding and assessing one's own competence. Further, the intercultural encounter proved to be a useful place for this experience. (See Holmes and O'Neill 2010, 2012 for further details of the project.)

In the second research project, Vivien asked students to form groups of four or five and collaborate on a (assessed) group task over 8 weeks, which is to deliver a real-life intercultural training session. Group members conducted needs analyses with guest trainees from practical sectors, designed one-hour-long training material accordingly, delivered the training with the trainees, and evaluated its effectiveness through post-training feedback. Alongside its explicit intercultural theme in line with the module aims, this task encouraged students to experientially engage with the interculturality within their group dynamics. Each student kept *in situ* learning journals to record moments of significance identified from their perspective of the group work. They then drew on these

journals to write post hoc reflections in an essay form on their personalised trajectories of intercultural competence development throughout this learning process. Students were also encouraged (not required) to incorporate comments from two critical friends they had shown these learning journals in order to enrich their post hoc reflection. The critical friends were anyone other than students undertaking the same module, who were willing to read the students' learning journals, either in part or in full, to offer an open, respectful, and usefully critical commentary. The exercise of intersubjectively constructing learning experiences aimed to offer students a hermeneutic possibility to generate new meanings from 'old' experiences, thereby moving towards intercultural praxis. (See Zhou and Pilcher 2018 for further details of the project.)

Through the experiences students gained from these research projects, and in their reflections on them, students demonstrated an ability to take action and work with others to achieve ethically appropriate ends, which, we believe, steer them towards the direction of becoming more informed intercultural actors. Their relationships with cultural others may enable them to (re)construct and (re)negotiate a more strongly developed sense of self; this may also enable them to retain important aspects of cultural, religious, historical, gendered, local/regional, etc. identity—an important transformative stage in developing students who can communicate responsibly with cultural others, engage in intercultural dialogue, and act as intercultural speakers (see Chapter 7 in this volume). Ultimately, their actions will work toward improving the human condition. Although these goals may be idealistic and not wholly achievable, they are, nonetheless, worth striving for.

A further objective of this approach, and one articulated by Sorrells (Chapter 23) is, ideally, to promote global engagement. Paige *et al*. (2009) describe global engagement as economic,

sociocultural, political, and other forms of behaviour intended to serve the common good locally, nationally, and globally. Whether or not, or to what degree, intercultural experiences promote global engagement has yet to be answered. However, formal and informal feedback from our students in these classes suggests that they benefit from the types of intercultural situations and problems they encounter through these student-centered teaching, learning, and research approaches.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

An examination of the research on intercultural communication in business/management contexts recognises a need to develop people who can span cultural and linguistic boundaries. On a basic level, they need the knowledge and skills of intercultural communication and competence.

Current approaches to intercultural business (education) have emphasised intercultural competence, focusing in particular on appropriateness and effectiveness (Deardorff 2009). However, given the cultural complexity of the workplace, people also need to be intercultural mediators who can negotiate cultural boundaries and differences, and collaborate and cooperate in their endeavors. Understandings of the intersectionality of intercultural business communication— e.g. the impact of multiple identities, identity construction and negotiation, and power relations—have yet to be fully explored.

Researchers and learners of intercultural business communication must respond to critical calls for expanding their exploration to alternative frames of inquiry. For example, Miike (2007) called for a paradigm shift that considers Eastern conceptualisations of communication. To this end, Chen and An suggest a (Chinese) model of intercultural

leadership, marked by (Buddhist, Confucian, Tao) religious influences that decree a 'holistic, interconnected, and transitional worldview', the need for harmony as an ethical principle of leadership, and an 'intuitive, sensitive, and indirect way of communication', which challenge the Euro-centric 'atomistic, confrontational, reductionist, and logical views' (2009: 203). And Jia and colleagues argue for a theory of intercultural communication that builds on Confucianist and Daoist principles: where personhood is central in building a community of a commonly shared future among humankind (Jia *et al.* 2019). Similarly, in cross-cultural management studies, calls have been made for a paradigmatic shift from positivist to interpretivist contributions, albeit regrettably 'unheard by the research community' according to Barmeyer *et al*.'s (2019) observation of post-2001 publications in top-rated journals in this domain.

Joining these critical calls, we suggest that in order to better understand a workplace where people meet with (common) goodwill for harmony and personal professional development and simultaneously pragmatic concerns such as intercultural conflict management, relationship building, and team effectiveness, learners need to pay heed to a long-standing conceptual disjuncture between culture and business in addition to – if not instead of – the 'gap' between (national) cultures. Answers regarding 'know-hows' would arise, ethnographically, from a space that is opened up from the confines of any one intellectual tradition, where the meaning of intercultural competence is continually debated and expanded in light of the full complexity of lived experiences.

Related topics

Culture, communication, context, and power; ethnocentrism; experiential learning; identity; intercultural citizenship; intercultural (communicative) competence; intercultural conflict;

intercultural mediator; intercultural training; neo-liberalism; professional and workplace settings; values

Further reading

Deardorff, D.K. and Ararasatnam-Smith, L. (2017) *Intercultural Competence in International Higher Education: International Approaches, Assessment, Application,* New York: Routledge. (a series of case studies across international and intercultural contexts on developing intercultural competence in preparing students in higher education for global engagement).

Ferri, G. (2018) *Intercultural Communication: Critical Approaches and Future Challenges,* London: Palgrave Macmillan. (an interdisciplinary examination and critical re-positioning of intercultural theory – as well as its interrelations with globalisation, education and dialogue in multicultural societies – in a post-methodological framework).

Guilherme, M., Glaser, E. and Méndez-García, M.C. (2010) *The Intercultural Dynamics of Multicultural Working,* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. (perspectives on intercultural communication in the workplace, drawing together extensive research on intercultural interaction in European work contexts; also includes a theoretical approach to mobility in transcultural Europe and exercises for developing intercultural competence).

Holden, N., Michailova, S., and Tietze, S. (2015) (eds) *Routledge Companion to Cross Cultural Management,* New York: Routledge. (an overview of cross-cultural management as an academic domain and field of practice, critically addressing issues including language and languages, cross-cultural management research and education, and the new international business landscape).

Holliday, A., Hyde, M., and Kullman, J. (2016) *Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book for Students*, 3rd edn, London: Routledge. (a source book that offers a critical examination of intercultural contexts and theories, with many useful scenarios for practical use in the classroom).

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